

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED IN THE SOUTH MEETING-HOUSE,

IN DANVERS,

SEPTEMBER 26, A. L. 5810,

AT THE CONSECRATION OF

JORDAN LODGE,

AND THE INSTALLATION OF THE OFFICERS,

IN PRESENCE OF THE MOST WORSHIPFUL THE

GRAND LODGE.

BY WILLIAM BATCHELDER.

SALEM:

PRINTED BY THOMAS C. CUSHING.

1810.

At a meeting of the JORDAN LODGE, Sept. 26, A.L. 5810.

VOTED,

That the R. W. ANDREW NICHOLS, jun. JOSEPH G. SPRAGUE, and Brother SYLVESTER PROCTER, be a committee to wait on the Rev. Brother BATCHELDER, and thank him for his excellent and truly Masonic Discourse, delivered before the Grand Officers and Brethren of the Masonic Order, at the Consecration of Jordan Lodge, and request a copy for the Press.

A copy from the records.

JOSEPH G. SPRAGUE, *Secretary.*

Danvers, Sept. 27, A.L. 5810.

In compliance with your request by the above committee, the following Discourse is submitted to your candor, from me,

WILLIAM BATCHELDER.

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DISCOURSE.

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PROVE ALL THINGS. HOLD FAST THAT WHICH IS GOOD.

LIBERAL precepts, enjoined by a writer who expresses precisely what he should say, with an honest, enlightened, generous mind, have interesting charms for rational delight. With this view we may esteem the text :—This disciplinary direction to chastise our intellectual powers by a studious investigation of subjects, and check our roving fancies and erring propensities, by a firm retention of truth, is a safe and estimable rule, to prune the asperities of nature, impress moral duties, and soften the manners of men : and societies coalescing with this design, merit applause. The rule, to prove all things, and hold fast that which is good, while it requires proof by experiment, concedes freedom to thought ; yet tacitly censures the levity of imagination, and explodes the glittering conjecture of fancy.

As a possession of the materials proper to trace and demonstrate subjects must be admitted ; therefore to prove the antiquity, design and use of Masonry, must be the result of masonic acumen. They professedly hold the key to the mysteries, and unlock the enigmatical portal to the art. When retracing the steps of mystic device, and calmly exploring the confusion of ages, they reject the vulgarized emblems and errors of polytheism, and cult the gems of the craft. It may suffice the curious, the inquisitive or unin-

tiated, to be informed, that an induction to the art by oral instruction is necessary, to furnish the mind with the arcana of the mysteries involved in figures, so that hieroglyphics which contain the maxims of the order, may be instantly known and readily deciphered. When oriental figures are divested of idolatrous trappings and unmeaning glitter, moral lessons appear; and it has been the laudable ambition of the learned to disentangle them. To the investigating mind, Egyptian mysteries, Phœnician maxims, Pythagorean secrets and Druidical rites are elucidated and purified by biblical skill; and the origin of many of their mingled views, encumbered rites and labored devotions, may be deduced from Hebrew emblems. As primitive science was allusively hid, and taught by characteristic signs, therefore, to preserve the art, continue ancient wisdom and erect a moral structure—to establish a universal language intelligible to the order in every clime, and adopt rules for faith and manners, is the professed design of this institution; and those who bewray the profession, incur censure. As every approved sentiment and practice is sanctioned by revelation, therefore the light of the ancients directs to the science. Those who encountered the toils of the rude ages of time with virtue and constancy, are samples of patient continuance in well doing. By retracing their steps, virtue is encouraged. Though rudeness prevailed in the antediluvian age, and threatened the extinction of light, condemning the maxims of truth matured by longevity, yet Noah, unyielding to the seductions of vice, verified the prediction at his birth, by preaching righteousness.

ness to comfort the faithful and reprove the vicious, till raised above the transgression and ruin of a deluged world. Thus learning by the toilsome benevolence of the patriarch, we are pleasingly impressed with his unforced piety, to see him, at the removal of the flood, ready to collect materials for an altar. We ought to emulate his virtue, and rebuke the avaricious who insincerely promise to worship after they have procured for themselves.

That distinguishing piety was succeeded by an establishment of the covenant; and as a token of God's wisdom and power to protect his people and annoy his foes, a bow was placed in the cloud. After one hundred and twenty years, some who journeyed from the east arrogantly attempted to erect a tower in the plains of Shinar to perpetuate their name; but the imperfect design was frustrated by the confusion of tongues. Probably like barbarians to each other the unintelligible speech of the presumptuous workmen might seem to each other like mocking replies, a provocation to their turbulent dispersion. Had they not symbolized their arts and impressed their science in hieroglyphics, a transmission of their acquirements would have been difficult. That event however stands as a frowning monitor against unwarranted practices. By passing among the ancients, lessons of virtue are taken from the venerable Abraham—of hospitality from Lot the just; while we are indicatively taught to obey by the petrified pillar of salt he left in the plain. Contemplation and submission are inculcated with native lustre by the mourning Isaac. Heroic fortitude, wisdom to plan, skill

to execute, and meekness to support, are teachable traits in the learned Moses. Thus progressing in the vestiges of the faithful, we arrive at Mount Moriah, to view the permanent foundation and admire the exquisite workmanship of the temple. As contemplations of Boaz and Jachin, the emblems of strength and stability, impart courage and perseverance, the order, beauty and symmetry of the fabric expand the moralizing mind; and the ordinances of divine service, the worldly sanctuary, the tabernacle, the golden candlestick, the shew bread, the second vail, and all the relative furniture, figuratively combine to give a zest for moral instruction.

To the prophetic signals we are indebted, as they distinctively point to the Archetype of symbols.—Joshua and Zerubbabel, as cotemporary laborers, are interesting teachers. The first as standing before the angel, divested of his filthy garments and clad in white, an emblem of innocence; the other with a plumb-line in his hand, founding the second temple, and bringing forth the top stone with shoutings. But as the regions of this science are inaccessible to the uninitiated, probably to such the most elaborate public delineation would need a translation; therefore ignorance must feel unarmed, and even the delicacy of virulence will restrain censure.

Should the casual introduction of an inapplicable figure excite momentary surprise, it will find an excusable shelter in that approved maxim of the order, that "the imperfections of a brother claim a brother's indulgence." Therefore they smite no honest laborer, as a conjectural tyro.

To moralize by metaphors, to renounce the chimeras of ignorance, and fertilize the domain of moral action, being the design of Masonry, is distinct from the blended rules of superstition. Their sentiments are abstractly moral. Being inducted by the *light* of science, directed by the *rule* of duty, led by the *line* of sincerity, and proportioned by the *square* of justice, they cheerfully employ the *plumb-line* of counsel to sound mental prejudices and passions, and candidly confess the truth of the poet's remark—that,

“ By education we have been misled,
So we believe, because we were so bred.
The priest continues what the nurse began,
And thus the child imposes on the man.”

Being conscious that a true interpreter of the manners, customs, rites, events and arts of antiquity will unfold the door to mental improvement, they select rules to enlighten, refine and elevate the mind, and render men useful in life. Also, sensible that true piety is not governed by human policy, passion, the sword or fire, they disclaim religious fury and intolerance, and detest an invasion of the rights of conscience. As they have borne the test of scrutiny, and unretaliated have met the cruel abuse of popish bulls, synodical edicts, and thundering anathemas to blot them from society, yet having assumed no religious tyranny they excite to emulation. Had their virtue always been as conspicuous as their retentive confidence to the craft, they would emblazon the historic page, and blunt the tooth of slander. Their avowed principles however are good, and are their

own recommendation to the liberal public. An individual departure from those maxims deserves timely rebuke; but to fix an invidious stigma upon a professional class of citizens for the deviations and impieties of some, is too censorious and uncharitable to be approved. The principles on which they professedly build, are honesty, truth, benevolence, charity and justice.

Honesty, as the bond of society and the gem of friendship and confidence, is as indispensable as the key-stone to a building. It is a permanent, energetic principle, a guard to temperance, a friend to virtue, and despises the groundless reputation of deceit. Allied to truth, it investigates with candor, triumphs over sophistry, and maintains an irresistible contest against crimes, while it supports rectitude of conduct, decency of manners and delicacy of sentiment. These radicals give a tone and permanency to virtue and friendship. Friendships built upon the illusions of fancy or the interest of the moment, are fickle as the reveries of a visionary, which elevate to deceive; or the unsubstantial gibberish of insanity. By honesty and truth benevolence is characterized, and the rule to do unto all men as thou wouldst they should do unto thee, forbids dissembled love and feigned affection.

Benevolence is not merely ideal, greeting itself while unfeeling to the calamities of indigence: it is a captivating quality, it inspirits the soul, is diffusive and commends itself. The heart impressed by good

will, mourns over merit in want, and pities misery in distress; and if an enemy hunger will feed him, and if he thirst will give him drink, not with a view to heap coals of fire on his head, and construe it as a privilege to insult his calamity. No. It delights to do good, to quench the blaze which flames from the breast of envy. It beams with modest warmth, and often kindles affection in the acrid breast of slander. It frequently produces shame and regret in the hearts of those who have sought to blacken what they could not destroy. Thus it possesses an influence, that while it subdues, it enriches the conquered, disarms the cruel, and diverts reproach. Benevolence, the bond of brotherhood, is graced by charitable deeds, and bids indigence arise and smile.

Charity, which seeketh not her own, envieth not, suffereth long and is kind, like an oracular gem in the high priest's robe, it modestly irradiates and imparts beneficence. It is the professional ambit of the masonic order; and those who are actuated by its genuine influence, do not ambitiously communicate with the right hand to gratify the left, or to gain the fulsome applause of flattery. The approbation of the Omniscient Benefactor is to them an ample reward. *Charity*, as an abstract quality, would be timorously kind and unboundedly munificent; therefore, to guard it from superstitious misapplications, it must be governed by justice.

Justice, as the celebrated Brown observes, is a regulating principle, and dictates to a righteous distribution, rendering to all their dues, custom to whom

custom, tribute to whom tribute ; equity to men, and aid to the indigent. Those principles are confessed, as the ethical basis which supports every regular column in the masonic building. A human compact thus sentimentally determined, will exhibit a humane, generous, noble expansibility of character ; and with a judicious liberality, exert every power to render society happy. Should it be retorted, that this bright character is often sullied by the imperfections of its votaries, and rendered suspicious ; and that the indelible stain given to the order by the deceptive enterprize and atheistical device of European philosophers, those demoralizing pretenders to illuminism, have stamped it with intriguing design ; let it be observed, that those blemishes are deplored, and these illicit obtrusions condemned by the upright.

It is acknowledged, that when unsuitable characters assume a professional badge, nothing valuable is gained, for with such, the grand simplicity of truth, virtue and innocence, is a nominal mantle for hypocrisy ; and the acquisition of such is additional shame, in which the members frequently become reciprocal sharers. Those who act a borrowed character, and personate virtue in words, are illusive, wicked and mean ; and although such may riot in violations, and unashamedly applaud the base arts of dissimulation, they enjoy nought but the vile revelry of misanthropy. But the original principles of this institution forbid vice, and inculcate virtue, enjoin an exact observance of relative and social duties, stimulate to active beneficence, and excite to

vigilance. They insist upon unanimity, founded upon the word of the Great Architect, and are unyielding to the capricious humors of partial metaphysicians. They encourage investigation, and commend firmness. These primordial rules are essential, and cannot be violated with impunity. They are suited to every grade—the embellishment of rulers, the defence of citizens, the attractive accomplishment of masters, and the confidential ornament of servants. No social compact can be honorable, happy and durable without a compliance with these requisites. They are good and profitable unto men. Should death terminate our existence and annihilate every idea of futurity, such rules are inseparable with our present good, to felicitate life. Should a careless ease, the result of insensibility, or the forced gaiety of wickedness, render us indifferent to those maxims, it would be a species of moral suicide. Those who indolently float through the rapid succession of time allotted them, regardless of the voice of wisdom, sordidly gratify themselves with fraudulent charms, and accumulate ruin. Hence the necessity of proving all things and holding fast that which is good, to repel ignorance, and cultivate the virtues which adorn society. The cautionary precept in the text implicitly prohibits a reliance upon exterior decorations and shadowy amusements, to the neglect of that illuminating vein in the ancient types, which is the soul of allegory, the vigor of devotion, and the inspiration of bliss. As the sublime evidence of everlasting light beams forth with indubitable proof, may we not regret that any, as a spirited writer remarks, should “take

as much care to guard against an inroad of ideas from this solemn quarter, as the inhabitants of Holland do against the irruption of the sea ;” and that their opinions should “really form a kind of moral dyke against an invasion from the other world.” But in justice to those views excited by the allegorical allusions in scripture, our time, talents and esteem are indispensably claimed, and our unremitted approbation of the Messiah demanded.

John, the harbinger of Jesus, whose memory is preserved by an anniversary festival, has left an inspired opinion, that our unreserved submission and highest veneration are due to the Preserver of Israel, who taketh away sin. This fervent Baptist, who preached in the wilderness of Judea, urging repentance, internal virtue and equivalent works, was recognized by the Messiah as a burning and shining light. He alarmingly repelled the boasting Pharisees, as the fruitless branches of an emblematical hierarchy ; and disregarded their impertinent claims, as the reciprocal pretensions of proud devotees.

The concurrent instructions of John the Baptist, of Christ and the Apostles, enforce the humbling thought, that the influences of the word of God, like a fire and a hammer that break the rock in pieces, are necessary, to subvert the mind—that our disorderly pride may be broken off, and contemptuous passions subdued—that the superfluous rust of deceit may be removed, and the heart, which is deceitful above all things, cleansed, and a right frame of spirit imparted—that ignorance may be suppress-

ed, and light, love and obedience inspirit the soul. Inspired principles must govern and purify us, and give stability to our hopes. For in the correct opinion of the writer of our text, we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds, if we would prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. A reluctance to trace the subject, evinces a disapproval of the intrinsic purity of the sacred emblems, and an unwillingness to prove all things and prefer the best. Surely the intense application of the most elevated genius may be honored, raised and rewarded by the truth. Angels desire to look into the mystery, and improve their intellectual pleasure, while studying the manifold wisdom of God in redemption. Spiritual truth enhances as we investigate, and encourages an intrepid composure under the darkening cloud of dissolution. Should we fondly doat over our imperfect virtues to the neglect of the efficient life of the WORD, and draw a guileful shade over the scene of death, the most critical stage of our existence, we should resemble the folly of a heedless mortal embarking on a foreign voyage with his eyes closed, lest he should be surprised by the shattered state of his vessel. Lamentably deluded must that mind be that refuses to prove and hold fast that which is good, that contemns the pure jewels of truth, and disregards the voice of the sinner's friend, who pathetically exclaims, I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich ; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and anoint thine eyes that thou mayest see.

May it be the happy consideration and choice of
each in this numerous assembly to embrace that
truth by which we may rise to the mansions of rest,
and enter

Complete in robes of light, to end our race,
Where unaffected candor fills the place ;
And charity th' illumin'd band combines,
No more to toil, or led by mystic signs ;
Where artless, pure, celestial eloquence,
Admits no diction to pervert the sense.—
The sublime arc with perfect echoes ring
Extatic praises to the eternal King.